Washtenaw Community College
ON THE RECORD

wccnet.edu/news /WashtenawCC @WashtenawCC @WashtenawCC MAY 2026

WORLD-CLASS WELDING

From competition floor to workforce pipeline, WCC is training top-level talent

Washtenaw Community College student Mikala Sposito has become the first female welding competitor to represent the United States at WorldSkills, marking a milestone achievement for both the student and the college's long-standing welding program.

A first-place victory at the USA Weld Trials in Huntsville, Alabama earned Sposito a trip to Shanghai, China to compete in WorldSkills this September.

The accomplishment reflects years of preparation inside one of the region's most established welding programs.

For decades, WCC has built a reputation for producing highly skilled graduates ready to enter the workforce in critical trades.

"It was insane and I couldn't believe it," Sposito said of earning SkillsUSA's one and only competitor spots. "That's the moment I was thinking about constantly – every single day of training. I was finally living what I had been visualizing this whole time."

That moment didn't come easily.

Sposito spent years building toward it, often trading time with friends and family for long hours in a welding booth.

WCC faculty members work closely with students to develop not only technique, but the discipline and resilience required to succeed at the highest levels.

See **WORLD SKILLS**, page 2

PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

Washtenaw Community College student Mikala Sposito will represent the United States at the WorldSkills welding competition this September in Shanghai, China. She is the first female welder to earn that honor and the sixth WCC student.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

WCC is training students for 'new collar' careers

By DR. ROSE B. BELLANCA
WCC President & CEO

For generations, the workforce has been divided into two categories: "white-collar" and "blue-collar." But today's economy is rewriting that script.

A growing number of careers fall into what many now call "new-collar" jobs, roles that blend technical expertise, hands-on skills and digital fluency.

These careers don't always require a four-year degree, but they do demand adaptability, problem-solving and a commitment to lifelong learning.

> "Our students aren't just preparing for jobs — they're preparing for careers that may not have existed a decade ago."
>
> — Dr. Rose B. Bellanca
> WCC President & CEO

Across industries, from advanced manufacturing and automotive technology to healthcare and information systems, the nature of work is changing rapidly.

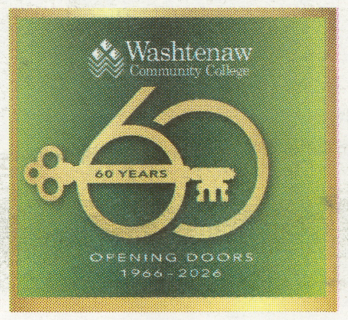
Automation, data and smart technologies are transforming how we build, repair, analyze and innovate.

As a result, the most in-demand workers are those who can bridge the gap between traditional skilled trades and emerging technologies.

That's where community colleges play a vital role. At Washtenaw Community College, we see this shift every day.

See **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**, page 2

INSIDE



60 YEARS OF SERVICE

For 60 years, taxpayer investment in WCC has strengthened our workforce, fueled our economy and expanded opportunity across our community. Learn how. **PAGE 4**

FOCUSING ON OUR SENIORS

From line dancing (above) to cybersecurity, WCC offers Washtenaw County senior citizens free classes to stay active and safe. Classes are free for any county resident age 65 or older. **PAGE 3**

ADDRESSING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER SHORTAGE

WCC is the community college partner in a new initiative addressing Michigan's early childhood educator shortage. **PAGE 3**

RETURN HOME FROM SPACE

More than two decades after leaving WCC, Aisha Bowe is officially a graduate of the college she credits with launching her career. And she brought gifts for us that traveled with her to space! **PAGE 2**

KEEPING UP THE GOOD WORK

For 60 years, taxpayer investment in Washtenaw Community College has strengthened our workforce, fueled our economy, and expanded opportunity across our community.

At its March meeting, the WCC Board of Trustees unanimously approved a resolution of intent to place a millage renewal on the August 4 ballot for Washtenaw County. The renewal will help WCC continue its mission of providing the community's most affordable pathway to higher education and sustaining that impact for future generations.

For more information, visit **wccnet.edu/millage**.

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Washtenaw Community College strives to make a positive difference in people's lives through accessible and excellent educational programs and services.

On the Record is written and designed by the WCC Marketing and Communications Department, Washtenaw Community College, 4800 E. Huron River Dr., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105-4800.

Questions about the WCC programs and services described in this publication should be directed to the Office of Admissions at 734-973-3543.

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Welcoming back a WCC legend

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

Aisha Bowe returned to Washtenaw Community College as a featured speaker for the TEDxWCC event, capping a day that celebrated her achievements and enduring connection to the institution.

At a campus reception, Bowe presented WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca with a WCC T-shirt and other items she carried with her into space. Each was accompanied by an official certificate of flight, commemorating their journey beyond Earth.

Following her time at WCC, Bowe transferred to the University of Michigan, where she earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in aerospace engineering. She has long credited WCC for putting her on the right path.

"At each decision point in my life, what happened (at WCC) served me so well," Bowe said. "When you think about all the community college students I meet around the country that think there's some kind of stigma, or that their degree isn't going to take them where they want to go, I'm excited to be the voice that says, 'Actually, it can be the foundation for anything you want to do.'"

Bowe went on to work as a rocket scientist for NASA before becoming a successful tech entrepreneur and STEM education advocate.

More recently, she achieved a lifelong goal by traveling to the edge of space aboard a Blue Origin flight.

The campus visit also marked a milestone moment in Bowe's academic journey when WCC awarded her a General Studies in Math and Natural Science associate degree.

During her time at the college, Bowe completed more than enough credits to earn an associate degree, but was focused instead on preparing for transfer to U-M.

Long celebrated as a WCC alumna and advocate, Bowe now officially holds the distinction of WCC graduate–an honor that reflects both her early academic foundation and her continued commitment to inspiring future students. ●

PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

Alumna Aisha Bowe discusses a Washtenaw Community College T-shirt that flew with her to space aboard a Blue Origin flight.

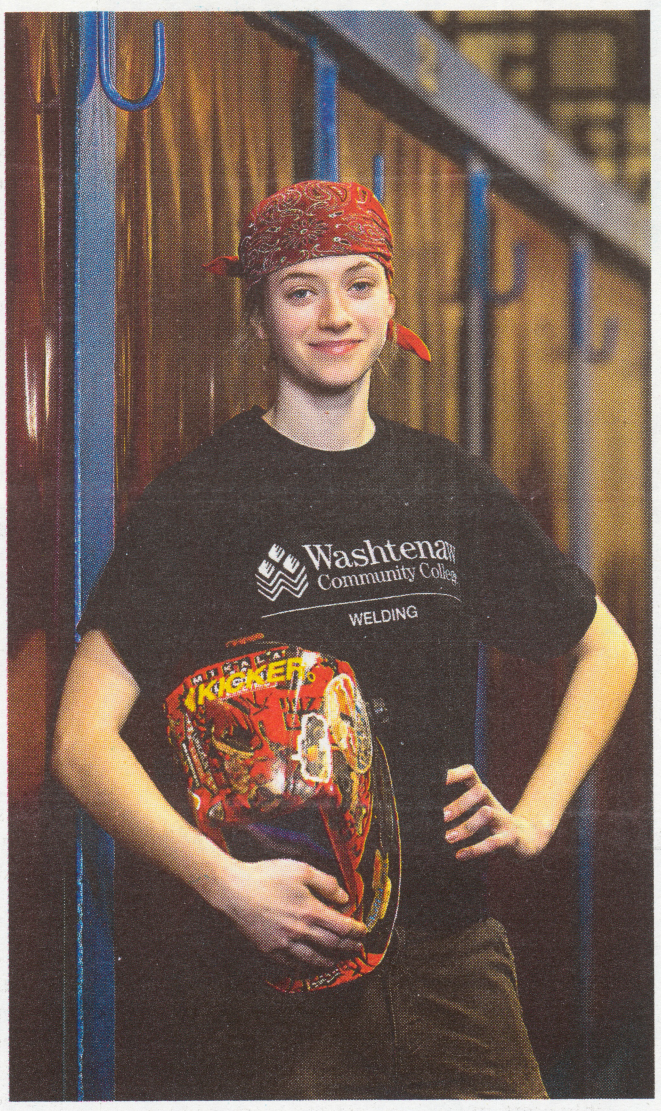


PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

"To be a welding competitor, you just have to want it more than anything ever. You have to be hungry for it and I was very hungry for it," says Mikala Sposito, a 21-year-old WCC welding student.

WORLD SKILLS

continued from cover

Glenn Kay (1997) – qualified for WorldSkills as WCC students, creating a pipeline of experience that helped shape Sposito's journey.

"It has benefited me greatly. I have such a family here," Sposito said. "Not only do I have the best welders in the country, I have the best people in the country too."

Pazkowski, who has been coaching and mentoring Sposito since her quest for a 2024 SkillsUSA state championship, has no doubts she has the skill, drive and determination to win a world championship in Shanghai.

"I told her at the very beginning of this, 'Your story is going to be a big deal,'" said Pazkowski.

"I don't want her to be remembered as being the first female to ever do this, I want her to be remembered as the best welder that's ever done this."

Sposito embraced that sentiment, turning long days and missed holidays into incremental gains that ultimately set her apart.

Her accomplishment also reflects the strength of a program that has consistently produced high-level competitors. Sposito is the sixth WCC welding student to advance to WorldSkills – more than any other institution in the country.

WCC has one of the largest welding labs in the state with 72 welding booths dedicated to a range of welding processes.

As demand for welders continues to outpace supply across Michigan, WCC plays a key role in preparing students for in-demand, high-wage careers. The program emphasizes hands-on training using industry-standard equipment, ensuring graduates are ready to contribute.

WCC-trained welders move into essential roles in manufacturing, construction and advanced industry sectors that power the local and state economy, helping address a critical and growing talent gap.

For Sposito, earning a place at WorldSkills is both a personal breakthrough and the realization of something she had envisioned through every hour of training.

It also earned her a $60,000 scholarship from the American Welding Society.

For Washtenaw Community College, it is another example of how that vision is turning into real opportunities for students and real impact for the community. ●

MORE ONLINE

To read an extended feature story about Mikala Sposito's quest and see video interviews and additional photos, visit **wccnet.edu/news/ontherecord**.

To learn more about the WCC welding and fabrication department, visit **wccnet.edu/welding**.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

continued from cover

Our students aren't just preparing for jobs – they're preparing for careers that may not have existed a decade ago.

Through short-term certificates, apprenticeships, and associate degree programs, they gain both the technical knowledge and the practical experience needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving workforce.

Equally important, these pathways are accessible. They offer a faster, more affordable route to careers that are not only in high demand, but also provide family-sustaining wages and long-term stability.

For many students, this means the opportunity to build meaningful careers without taking on significant debt.

Our partnerships with local employers ensure that what students learn in the classroom aligns with real-world needs.

Whether it's mastering advanced manufacturing equipment, working with cutting-edge healthcare technology, or developing skills in cybersecurity and data analytics, WCC students are learning to adapt, pivot and lead.

These "new-collar" careers reflect a broader truth about today's workforce: success is no longer defined by a single educational path.

It's defined by skills, resilience and the ability to keep learning.

As we look to the future, community colleges will continue to be at the center of this transformation–opening doors, strengthening our regional economy, and preparing students not just for their first job, but for a lifetime of opportunity. ●

What do you call someone who attended WCC?
Employed.©
Summer sessions begin May 11, May 26 and June 23
wccnet.edu/enroll
Washtenaw Community College

INVESTING IN LIFELONG LEARNING

Keeping our seniors safe and active

By RICH REZLER
Director of Communications

As more essential services move online, older adults are increasingly being asked to navigate a digital world – and avoid the risks that come with it.

Through its "Senior Focus" program, Washtenaw Community College helps residents 65 and older better understand technology and protect themselves from cyber threats, while also offering classes that support active, engaged lifestyles.

Since the inception of its Emeritus Scholarship, WCC has provided more than $7.7 million worth of free credit and personal enrichment classes to county residents 65 and older.

Technology-focused courses such as "AI and Cybersecurity Workshop" and "Exploring Smartphones and Tablets" help seniors build confidence and recognize potential scams.

"We feel it's very important to have an awareness of what cyber threats may be and to understand the different warning signs of cyber threats and how they should protect their personal information," said WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca. "You can never stop learning, especially today. Learning keeps you young."

To make the learning accessible, the college offers these short-term courses at 14 different community locations throughout Washtenaw County.

"We try our best to offer short-term courses at our senior centers to be there for them," Bellanca said.

WCC trainer Denise Swope said understanding devices and digital communication is now essential.

"I think these classes are vital ... It kind of reminds me of when telephones and television came into existence. You start realizing the need as technology changes," Swope said. "It's a way of life for us now and you want to be safe."

PHOTO BY RYAN RIGGS

Washtenaw Community College trainer Denise Swope (far right) leads a free Senior Focus class at the Pittsfield Township Senior Center. "AI and Cybersecurity Workshop" and other Senior Focus classes are offered for free to all county residents 65-and-older at 14 different community centers across Washtenaw County.

While cybersecurity and digital literacy are a growing focus, the program extends beyond technology. Classes in arts, languages, home and life, and well-being – along with activities like line dancing – help older adults stay active mentally and socially.

Bobbi Amrhein, a Ypsilanti Township resident who first attended WCC in 1969, began taking line dancing classes after retiring nearly 14 years ago.

"When I retired, I started taking line dancing classes two days per week and I'm going to do it until I can't," she said.

As the population ages and technology evolves, college leaders say programs like Senior Focus help residents stay safe, connected and engaged, underscoring the value of lifelong learning. ●

MORE ONLINE

Check out a list of cybersecurity tips to help older adults stay safe in today's digital world at **wccnet.edu/cybersafe**.

That page also includes the "Senior Focus" classes offered by WCC, plus addresses for local community centers where classes are held.

To learn more about the Emeritus Scholarship for county residents age 65 and older, visit **wccnet.edu/emeritus**.

Tackling state's early childhood educator shortage

By FRAN LeFORT
Director of Media Relations

Washtenaw Community College is playing a key role in a new statewide effort to address Michigan's early childhood educator shortage, offering no-cost pathways that allow current and aspiring teachers to earn credentials and degrees while continuing to work.

WCC is the sole community college in the MiEarly Apprentice program, a partnership with the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative and Northern Michigan University, serving as a key entry point into the educator pipeline.

The need is significant, with most Michigan communities classified as childcare deserts and thousands of additional educators needed to meet the state's "PreK for All" goals.

About 80 students are currently enrolled in the program at WCC, pursuing Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials and associate degrees as part of a structured, stackable pathway.

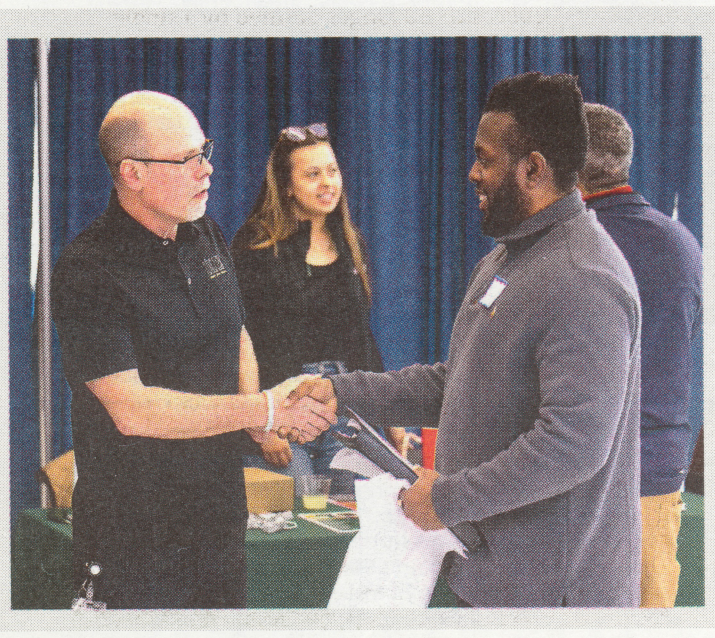
Tuition is covered through a "last dollar in" model, eliminating out-of-pocket costs and reducing financial barriers for participants.

A key feature of the program is a 3+1 partnership with Northern Michigan University, allowing students to complete three years at WCC before transferring to finish a bachelor's degree and teacher certification online.

The flexible design enables students to stay employed, complete student teaching in their local communities and save more than $36,000 compared to traditional pathways.

By combining tuition-free access, flexible coursework and strong institutional partnerships, WCC and its collaborators are helping build a sustainable pipeline of early childhood educators – supporting working families and expanding access to quality childcare across the state. ●

Learn more about the MiEarly Apprentice program at miedworkforce.org/miearly-apprentice.



CAREER & INTERNSHIP FAIR

WHERE CAREERS BEGIN AND TALENT IS FOUND

Students and the Washtenaw County community were invited to connect with local employers at the college's Spring Career & Internship Fair in April.

Hosted by the college's WCC Center for Career Success, the event helps students take the next step toward meaningful careers while giving regional employers direct access to a skilled, motivated talent pipeline.

WCC hosts two career fairs each year, with the next scheduled for Monday, October 26. Visit wccnet.edu/careerfair for more details

PHOTO BY JD SCOTT

KEEP UP THE Good Work

Local leaders discuss their relationship with Washtenaw Community College

By TIFFANY FORD
President & CEO,
University of Michigan Credit Union

Working together for our shared success is a central purpose at the University of Michigan Credit Union (UMCU) and our long-standing partnership with Washtenaw Community College (WCC) perfectly reflects that.

To help empower individuals in our community, we collaborate with WCC on an ongoing basis to enhance and expand access to financial education. For example, UMCU provides resources and information to participants during Free College Week, an annual event each spring offering free classes and events to community members.

On campus, we're honored to be a trusted partner to many WCC staff and administrators, as we are invited to teach our Financial Fitness for College Students workshop at the Bailey Library, at student orientations, for academic classes and for various student groups.

We're also very proud of our unique partnership with WCC to provide affordable financing options for students pursuing professional development programs. This "Fast Track" training provides essential job training for key careers in health care, web design, cybersecurity and much more.

This program meets our joint commitment to eliminate barriers and provide access to the training and education needed for individuals to generate sustainable income with in-demand jobs.

UMCU shares a common goal with WCC – we want Washtenaw County to grow and thrive, now and into the future!

As a board member at Ann Arbor SPARK along with WCC President Dr. Rose B. Bellanca, I see first-hand how passionate she and other board members are about the need for innovative economic development – it's the engine that drives us forward.

WCC is much more than a college. It's a vibrant and inclusive organization that strengthens the fabric of the community by providing opportunities for people of all ages to learn, grow and achieve.

On behalf of the 246 team members at UMCU, we thank you for your partnership and for all you do for our community. The future is bright! ●

60 years of Keeping Up the Good Work

AFFORDABILITY

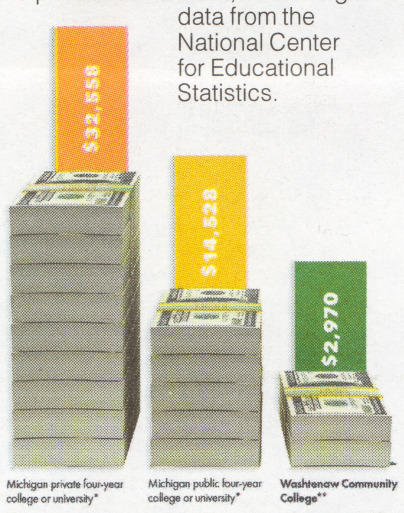
Since 1966, WCC's **tuition rate for in-district students** has kept pace with the overall rate of inflation while other standard expenses have risen dramatically over the same period.

Tuition and fees at Washtenaw Community College remain highly affordable, with total student costs consistently ranking in the lowest quartile of Michigan community colleges.

Last year, the WCC Board of Trustees unanimously approved a tuition freeze at **$99 per credit for on-campus courses** and **$112 per credit for distance learning courses** for in-district students.

Over the past 10 years, in-district, on-campus tuition has increased just $5 per credit (4.2%) and distance learning $6 per credit (5.6%). The rate of inflation over the same time period is roughly 39%.

WCC's annual cost of attendance of $2,970 for a full-time class load is a fraction of the cost students pay on average at the state's four-year public and private universities, according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics.



CAREERS LAUNCHED

The first graduates of WCC earned respiratory therapy certificates in 1967. Since then, a total of **59,127 individuals have earned 45,391 associate degrees and 44,384 certificates**.

In the last complete academic year, **2,354 certificates** were awarded and **1,476 associate degrees** were earned.

The college offered 22 educational programs when it first opened. That number has grown to **more than 140** since, many programs added at the suggestion of local industry. Fifty-one different programs are available completely online, which enables working adults flexibility to include education in their work and family responsibilities.

LOCAL INDUSTRY INPUT

WCC fuels local and regional growth by **training a strong local workforce**.

Nearly 250 representatives from a wide range of local businesses are members of **WCC advisory boards** that ensure the college's curriculum matches what local businesses need.

Washtenaw Community College

60 YEARS

OPENING DOORS 1966 - 2026

Thank you, Washtenaw County residents, for making WCC the community's college. YOUR college.

For 60 years, taxpayer investment in Washtenaw Community College has strengthened our workforce, fueled our economy and expanded opportunity across our community.

Since 1966, WCC has opened doors to Washtenaw County residents to learn, grow and build brighter futures.

WCC's impact is everywhere – in the nurses who care for us, the officers who protect us, the teachers who educate our children, the skilled trades and manufacturing professionals who build and power our region, and the cybersecurity specialists who safeguard our digital world.

You know them. You count on them.

WCC is not just a college.

It is the county's superpower.

Through times of profound change, from economic recessions and civil rights movements to global pandemics and the emergence of artificial intelligence, WCC has remained true to its mission: improving lives through high-quality, accessible and affordable education.

Thank you for believing in the power of education and helping make six decades of student success and community impact possible.

Check out these data points from the last academic year and see for yourself how your continued support of Washtenaw Community College has benefitted the communities we live in! ●

TOP-RATED COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WCC was recently recognized by the State of Michigan for having the highest student completion rate of all community colleges across the state. Other third-party honors:

- No. 1 Community College in Michigan
- Center of Excellence in Nursing Education
- National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense
- U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship Ambassador
- Gold-Level Veteran-Friendly School

TRANSFER STUDENTS

Washtenaw Community College → University of Michigan

WCC transfers more students to the University of Michigan than any other college or university. Over the last 10 years, **transfers from WCC to U-M have increased 74%** (from 154 to 268).

Over the last five years, **16,761 WCC alumni enrolled in 1,147 different colleges and universities** throughout Michigan and the country. While a majority stay close to home (51% to Eastern Michigan University, University of Michigan or Michigan State University), others attend prestigious universities like Stanford, Harvard and Yale.

EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

By blending classroom instruction with paid, on-the-job training through WCC's industry partners, **apprenticeship programs prepare students** for higher-wage, high-demand careers.

WCC hosts Michigan's chapter of the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME), with its largest cohort yet in 2025, in an 18-month program combining campus classes and hands-on employer work.

The program offers paid on-the-job training and mentoring through industry partners and educational pathways to an **associate degree in Mechatronics—Robotics and Automated Systems** in less than two years.

SUCCESS GUARANTEE

Washtenaw Community College STUDENT SUCCESS GUARANTEE

WCC graduates are ready to join the workforce or transfer to a four-year institution. **It's a guarantee!**

In short, a WCC Board of Trustees policy states that if a student with a WCC degree isn't prepared for the next step in their lives — be it entry-level employment or pursuing a bachelor's degree — they can **retake courses tuition-free**.

12,000+

Nurses and certified nursing aids trained at WCC.

1,400+

Law enforcement officers that began their career at Washtenaw County agencies after graduating from the WCC Police Academy.

MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

WCC is built for real lives. Roughly 40% of students are age 25+ and 72% of them attend classes part-time.

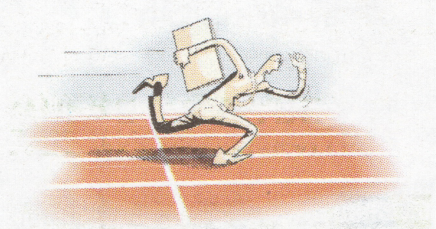
WCC has made adult learners a priority. Flexible online, evening and weekend class options help adult students balance college with work and family responsibilities.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Along with continually growing its connection to local K-12 school districts, WCC charters **Washtenaw Technical Middle College**, one of the largest and most successful early middle colleges in the nation.

In addition to WTMC, WCC has partnered in **early middle college** opportunities in Ypsilanti, Dexter, Plymouth/Canton and Livingston County over the past decade.

In Fall 2025, WCC welcomed a total of **1,665 dual-enrolled students** from 79 different high schools. That number accounts for 14.3% of WCC's enrollment.



FAST-TRACK LEARNING

Last year, community members enrolled in **7,248 training and development courses** offered by WCC's Economic Workforce & Community Development department.

Fast-track job training courses are aligned with industry certification and offer a way to quickly earn the skills and/or credentials that employers want.

Professional development classes are offered in categories such as data analytics, digital marketing, finance & accounting, human resources and more.

SKILLED TRADES

WCC supported instructor and apprentice training — both in-person and online — for **members of five different national trades organizations** last year. This includes approximately 6,000 members who attend instructor training on WCC's campus each summer.

The on-campus summer training programs bring an **estimated $23 million in economic impact** to the community, in addition to the college's **$524 million** estimated overall annual economic impact on the region.